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Superintendent of Schools

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Dear GPS Parents/Staff:

I hope you all had an opportunity to spend time with your families and loved ones over the Holidays. As we enter the New Year, the tragedy experienced by Sandy Hook Elementary School and Newtown community on December 14th remains foremost in our thoughts. We are eager to support the Newtown community in any way we can, and to that end, our students and staff have stepped forward--to gather belongings, raise funds, and send heartfelt statements of compassion.

You can be assured that the Greenwich Public Schools are safe and secure. At the same time, we are in the process of a thoughtful review of all safety and security measures, and doing so in close coordination with the First Selectman and Chief of Police. Schools nationally remain one of the safest locations for children—we have to make sure that continues to be the case in Greenwich.

Priorities in our review include:

- Conducting a facilities inventory to review and address needs with regard to door locks, window coverings, and other physical factors essential to safety and security
- Revising expectations and timing for conducting fire and lockdown drills (please note that we will recommence drills early this month; these had been on hold since mid-December).
- Reviewing all existing safety and security procedures and making sure they are implemented
- Standardizing a specific and common procedure for allowing entry to schools
- Reviewing/revising District crisis team and decision-making protocols
- Consulting with Principals, Greenwich Police Department, area Police Chiefs, area Superintendents and PTAC to consider all possible options
- Attending expert-led sessions on school safety and security, such as a statewide January 7th Security Symposium sponsored by CT Association of School Superintendents (CAPSS), CT Association of Schools (CAS), CT Association of Boards of Education (CABE), CT Association of School Business Officials (CASBO), & CT State Department of Education (CSDE)
- Developing a multi-phase plan for improving safety and security, which includes a communications plan to benefit and inform students, staff, parents and community

I continue to receive emails from parents and staff with suggestions for increased security, especially in regards to the merits of armed security guards at each school. (As many know, the Stamford Public Schools just added unarmed security guards at every elementary school.) Adding armed guards at all schools, which some parents have advocated, is a complicated step that presents many pros and cons, and may ultimately have minimal effects in the type of tragedies in Newtown and Columbine. Nevertheless, we will consider the option as we review our safety and security procedures relative to best practices in Connecticut and nationally.

Please know that the Greenwich Police Department will continue to provide an increased presence around all our schools for the next couple of weeks. Police will be in uniform and in civilian attire, as well as in standard and unmarked police vehicles. In addition, police patrols will continue to give highest priority to any and all events in or around our schools.

The safety and security of our students and staff are our highest priority. We will be thoughtful in the consideration of the various options for enhancing our safety and security procedures. Please understand that for the purpose of safety, we are not at liberty to share many of the details of our emergency plans. We will, however, continue to update you with appropriate and necessary information.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'W. McKersie'.

William S. McKersie, Ph.D.
Superintendent
Greenwich Public Schools